

"Because, *stupid*," said Bullyboss, "I make her feel better. Her mum wants her to get to the Olympics. Trouble is, Holly doesn't like gymnastics anymore. She wants to do music instead. She thinks her dad might understand, but he's been stolen by her new stepbrother. Well, I make that stepbrother pay, see? He's got everything, he has: a nice mum, and Holly's dad, and nobody making him win medals and telling him off if he doesn't . . . He deserves punishing . . . *that's* why I threw his stupid toy pig out of the car window . . ."

Jack was amazed. He'd never imagined Holly thought he was lucky . . .

"Only Holly feels really guilty now . . . She got rid of me and swore she'd never bully the boy again . . . but she will . . ."

"Course she will, 'course she will," said the ear, in its nasty sly voice. "*My* owner's just the same. She was caught reading her sister's diary, and vowed she'd never sneak around and eavesdrop ever again—but how else is she going to find out secrets? Secrets are fun. Secrets are my favorite thing. Who wants to hear a good secret I heard today, when I was sneaking around on the outskirts of Bother-It's-Gone?"

All the Bad Habits clamored to hear the secret.

"I was sitting in a bush on the edge of the Wastes," said the ear. "It's a good place to hear things, because the Loss Adjusters patrol there to make sure no Surplus tries to sneak off the Wastes and up the mountain."

"Get on with it!" snarled Bullyboss.

"Well, they were talking about a couple of Things that are on the run," said Sneaky. "Things that shouldn't be down here in the Land of the Lost at all. And you know what those Things are?"

"What?" asked several of the mouths.

"A cuddly pig and an action figure!" said the ear. "*Exactly* like—"

But at that moment a gigantic *BOOM* echoed across the Wastes. The ground shuddered and all the Bad Habits screamed.

“The hunt’s afoot!” shouted Compass gleefully. “It’s the Loser! You four, stay with me! Now, RUN!”



THE LOSER

Compass rolled off very fast and the Bad Habits scattered, shrieking, into the darkness, as did Broken Angel and Blue Bunny, but for a few moments, Jack was so terrified he couldn't move at all.

Two gigantic white searchlights were moving through the sky above the Wastes. Their twin beams swept the ground, illuminating the many scurrying Things that were running pell-mell away from the Loser. The searchlights were his eyes, and they swung over the snowy wastes as the Loser turned his giant head this way and that. He was so tall that Jack could actually hear the top of his head scraping on the high wooden sky as his blinding eyes scanned the ground for Things to eat.

It was hard to tell whether he was a giant man or a robot. He didn't walk on feet, but on steel points like a two-legged spider. His body, his arms, and his legs were all covered in millions and millions of broken Things, so that he glistened all over with cogs, springs, handles, aerials, buttons, lids, and other bits of the bodies he'd torn to pieces before eating.

The Loser let out a terrible cry that shook the ground and made the boulders tremble. It was a howl of fury but also of anguish, as though he'd lost something he loved and would never, ever get back.

And then he swooped.

An enormous hand with fingers like steel girders swished across the Wastes, scooping up fleeing Things. Jack heard their screams as the Loser pulled them up into the air and examined them by the light of his pitiless eyes.

"Jack, MOVE!" shouted the Christmas Pig, seizing Jack's hand and tugging as the Loser stooped again. The giant steel fingers flew past once more, coming so close to where Jack was standing that he saw the jagged fingertips, encrusted with glass and steel.

Jack let the Christmas Pig pull him along, but his legs felt numb with terror and he kept tripping. The beams from the Loser's eyes were darting and flashing all around them, so that Jack became sick and dizzy and lost all sense of direction. At any moment, he was sure, he'd feel the giant metal hand of the Loser closing around him and yanking him up into the air.

"Where's Compass?" he cried as the Christmas Pig pulled him on.

"I don't know," shouted the Christmas Pig. "Just run, we've got to find somewhere to hide!"

The Loser screamed again and the spotlights of his eyes slid past them, grazing Jack's elbow. Jack heard Holly's voice somewhere out in the darkness.

"Please no—please no—argh!"

"Jack, come on!" shouted the Christmas Pig, because Jack had stopped running and was trying to pull free of his grip.

"Holly!" said Jack. "He's got Holly!"

"It isn't Holly, you know it isn't Holly!" said the Christmas Pig, dragging Jack onward with both trotters. "It was Holly's bad habit and you should be glad it's gone!"

But Jack hated hearing Holly's voice so desperate and scared, and was only distracted when he spotted Broken Angel up ahead, running for her life, but stumbling over her torn dress, and unable to see properly through her only remaining eye.

"Take my free hand!" Jack called to her.

"Oh, thank you!" she cried.

But as she stretched her unbroken arm toward him, the beams from the Loser's eyes found her. The broken angel tripped, and the Loser pounced. His huge glittering fist seized her, and she was lifted up into the air.

"There's nothing we can do!" said the Christmas Pig fiercely as Jack tried to pull him backward. "Run, Jack, run, or it'll be us next!"



THISTLES

Lie flat!" said the Christmas Pig, pulling Jack behind a large clump of thistles, so they were hidden in shadow. Huddled together on the snowy ground they peered through the spiky leaves. The Loser's arms were now full of Things, and he was striding away from them, the ground shaking as he went.

"The angel, the poor angel!" gasped Jack through numb lips. If only he'd been faster at grabbing her hand, she might not have been taken! "What happens to them? What does he do to them? Perhaps we can rescue them!"

"We can't," said the Christmas Pig quietly. "He's taking them to his lair. That's where he tears them to pieces and sucks out the Alivened bit.

Then, if he likes their bodies, he makes them part of his armor.”

“But what if they were found, now, Up There?” said Jack.

“That would save them,” said the Christmas Pig, “but nobody’s looking, Jack. Nobody cares that they’re lost—they’re even glad to be rid of them. What human would want a Christmas angel that badly broken? Who’d want a nasty nose-picking habit?”

“But after the Loser sucks out the Alivened part, and breaks up their body and makes it part of his body, what happens to the Thing Up There?” asked Jack. “The angel’s still tangled in the tree, isn’t she?”

“Not for long,” said the Christmas Pig. “Once the Loser has sucked out her Alivened part, she’ll vanish Up There. There’s no going back for a Thing that’s eaten by the Loser. You’re gone forever. It’s what humans call death.”

Jack was so cold, tired, and scared, he wanted DP so badly, and he felt so guilty about the angel, he couldn’t keep back the tears any longer. He broke down. He tried not to make any noise, but he hadn’t fooled the Christmas Pig, who put his trotters around Jack and pulled him close.

“We’ll freeze unless we hug,” said the pig gruffly. “We’ll stay here—maybe get a few hours’ sleep—and then, when it’s light, we’ll try and find a way to the City of the Missed.”

“But how will we find our way without Compass?” asked Jack.

“I don’t know yet,” admitted the Christmas Pig. “But we’ll think of something.”

So Jack curled up beside the Christmas Pig, who cuddled him, and slowly Jack began to warm up. He was still scared and miserable, but at least he was warmer.

“Thanks, Christmas Pig,” he said, after a while.

“You’re welcome,” said the Christmas Pig, sounding surprised.

After a short silence, Jack said, "It's a stupid name."

"What is?" asked the Christmas Pig.

"The Christmas Pig," said Jack. "It's too long. I wouldn't have called you that if I'd kept you. It isn't an everyday name."

"What would you have called me, then?" asked the Christmas Pig.

Jack thought for a while.

"Maybe 'CP,'" he said. "Which stands for 'Christmas Pig.'"

"CP," said the Christmas Pig. "I like that."

"I could ask Holly to call you that, if you like," said Jack, yawning.

"What d'you mean?" said the Christmas Pig.

"When I give you to her," said Jack.

"I don't understand," said the Christmas Pig.

"You made me promise to give you to Holly when we get back from the Land of the Lost. Remember?"

"Oh," said the Christmas Pig. "Yes, I remember."

They lay for a while without talking, but Jack could tell that the Christmas Pig wasn't asleep.

"We'll still see each other," said Jack, now feeling drowsy, "when we get home. We might even all play together. You'll like DP."

"I'm sure I will," said the Christmas Pig. "We're brothers, after all."

"Yes," said Jack. "I didn't think so at first, but you're quite similar, really. D'you . . ." he yawned. "D'you think we'll find DP soon?"

"I'm sure we will," said the Christmas Pig. "You'll miss him forever, so he must be in the City of the Missed. It's the only place left to look."

"Yes," said Jack. He was on the very edge of sleep now, and he could almost imagine that he was cuddled up with DP beside him. The Christmas Pig didn't smell new anymore: he'd become grubby from hid-

ing in the smelly lunch box and their long walk down the earthy tunnel to the Wastes.

"I can't wait to see DP. Won't he be surprised when he realizes I came all this way to rescue him?" said Jack.

"He'll be amazed," said the Christmas Pig. "No boy has done this for a toy, ever, in the history of the world."

Jack was on the very edge of sleep when he heard the rattling of the Christmas Pig's tummy beans again.

"Is the Loser coming?" he whispered.

"No," said the Christmas Pig. "Don't worry. Sleep."

Jack thought he heard a sniff.

"Are you all right, CP?"

"Of course I'm all right," said the Christmas Pig.

This was a relief, because for a moment, Jack had thought that the Christmas Pig was crying.



TRAIN TRACKS

The sun was rising on the high wooden ceiling that was the sky in the Land of the Lost. Although it was only painted, it shone brightly enough to wake Jack as he lay curled up behind the thistles on the Wastes.

It had stopped snowing, but was still very cold. The Wastes of the Unlamented stretched as far as he could see in every direction, covered in snow, the occasional clump of thistles swaying in a chilly wind. There was no sign of any Thing—not even the Christmas Pig.

Panicking, Jack struggled to his feet.

“CP?” he called. “CP, where are you?”

"It's all right, I'm here!" said the Christmas Pig, hurrying back into sight. "I've found something—come over here!"

He led Jack a short distance and pointed.

"Look. Railway tracks."

"They must lead to the City of the Missed!"

"Exactly," said the Christmas Pig. "The trouble is, without Compass, I don't know which direction to go in."

They looked up and down the railway tracks, but there was nothing to tell which way led to Bother-It's-Gone and which to the City of the Missed.

A noise behind them made them jump. They wheeled around to see the blue bunny, as grubby as ever, although tears had made clean streaks in his muddy fur.

"It's you!" he gasped. "Oh, I'm so glad the Loser didn't get you!" He hugged first Jack and then the Christmas Pig, which left both of them rather muddy.

"We're glad he didn't get you, either," said Jack.

"Where's Compass?" asked Blue Bunny.

"We don't know," said the Christmas Pig. "She rolled off into the dark, and we weren't fast enough to keep up."

"Oh dear," moaned Blue Bunny. "I hope she wasn't caught. And I'm so worried about Broken Angel. She told me to run as quick as I could, but when I looked back, I couldn't see her anymore. I've been searching for her all night. She was my best friend. Have you seen her?"

"No," said the Christmas Pig, with a warning look at Jack. "Blue Bunny, I don't suppose you know where these tracks lead, do you?"

"I'm afraid not," said Blue Bunny, considering the train tracks. "I'll tell you something strange, though. When the train is traveling that way"—

he pointed toward the horizon which was still dark—"the Things on board look sad. But when the train is traveling in that direction"—he pointed toward the horizon that was glowing red and gold, from where the painted sun had risen—"the Things on board look happy."

Jack looked at the Christmas Pig and could tell he was thinking exactly what Jack was: this surely meant that the Things traveling east, toward the place where the painted sun had risen, were journeying toward the City of the Missed rather than Bother-It's-Gone.

"I think we'll take a stroll this way," said the Christmas Pig, setting off along the train tracks toward the ever-lightening horizon.

"D'you mind if I come?" asked Blue Bunny.

"Of course not," said Jack kindly, so the bunny hopped after them.



THE CITY GATES

They walked for hours along the train tracks toward the horizon, and saw nothing ahead except more snow-covered ground and the tracks stretching into the distance. Jack kept glancing up at the painted sky. The Christmas Pig had said that a day here was an hour above in the Land of the Living and Jack couldn't help thinking about Poem's warning that they had to leave the Land of the Lost before Christmas Eve ended. The idea of being trapped down here forever, waiting for the Loser to catch him, was dreadful. But Jack was certain that if he found DP, then DP would make everything all right, just as he'd always done, so he kept walking as fast as he could along the train tracks, following the Christmas Pig.

The painted sun high above them slid slowly across the wooden sky and began to descend into more dark cloud. It started to snow again.

At last, the Christmas Pig stopped, his trotter shading his little black eyes.

"Jack, can you see something?" he whispered. "Something . . . sparkling?"

Jack peered toward the horizon. Sure enough, in the far distance, he could see something glittering.

"Is it the sea?" he asked.

They walked a little farther and soon the misty outlines of a beautiful walled city took shape. They could see turrets and spires, and the golden roof of what looked like a palace.

At last they got near enough to make out a pair of golden gates in the city wall. They were engraved with the same vines and flowers as the golden door back in Misland. Now the train tracks were joined by a second set, which arrived from a different direction. Jack guessed the second tracks came directly from Misland, carrying the Things that had gone through the golden door.

The Christmas Pig held out a warning trotter.

"Loss Adjusters!" he whispered.

Sure enough, a dagger, a nail file, and a fierce-looking nutcracker were marching up and down in front of the gates. These Loss Adjusters were wearing the fanciest black hats Jack had yet seen: tall helmets with long black feathers sticking out of them, while the "L"s on the hats were made of gold.

Jack, the Christmas Pig, and Blue Bunny crouched down out of sight behind another clump of thistles, the snow settling on their heads and shoulders as they stared at the gates, trying to think of a plan.

"Perhaps," Jack whispered, "if we wait until the train comes along, we can jump onto the back of it?"

"It'll be going too fast," said the Christmas Pig. "You'd get injured."

"Wait—you're trying to *get in*?" asked Blue Bunny in amazement. Jack nodded.

"They'll never let you!" said Blue Bunny. "We're Surplus! We don't belong in such a fine place as that! That's where the Things that are truly missed go!"

"There's nothing very special about those gates," said the Christmas Pig, ignoring the blue bunny. "They seem quite ordinary. It's the Loss Adjusters who are the problem. They'll grab us and hand us to the Loser the moment we show ourselves. If only we had a decoy."

"Do you just want to live in nice houses?" asked Blue Bunny. "Or is there another reason you want to get in?"

"Yes," said Jack, before the Christmas Pig could stop him. "Somebody I need's in there. He's called DP and he's my favorite cuddly toy."

For a long moment, Jack and Blue Bunny stared into each other's eyes and then Blue Bunny let out a long sigh of amazement.

"You're a boy," he whispered. "You're real."

"He isn't," said the panic-stricken Christmas Pig. "He's an action figure called—"

"It's all right, Pig," said Blue Bunny, "I won't tell anybody, I promise. You really came all the way into the Land of the Lost to find your favorite toy?" he asked Jack, who nodded.

"Then I'll be your decoy," said Blue Bunny. "It would be an honor."

And before either Jack or the Christmas Pig could stop him, the blue bunny scrambled out from their hiding place and gamboled right over

to the Loss Adjusters, who all stopped marching up and down and stared at him.

"Hello there!" said the Blue Bunny. "Please, could I come and live in your city?"

"Don't be stupid," sneered the dagger, threatening to jab the bunny. Blue Bunny scampered away a short distance and tried again.

"Please let me in! I can do tricks!"

He tried to turn a somersault, but landed on his head, which crumpled his ears. The Loss Adjusters jeered, but they didn't even bother to chase him away.

Just then, there were several loud bangs over their heads. Everybody—Jack and the Christmas Pig, Blue Bunny and the Loss Adjusters—looked up. It sounded as though a gigantic ball was bouncing across the high painted ceiling. This was the first time that Jack had heard a noise from the Land of the Living. There were very few finding holes over the Wastes of the Unlamented, but it so happened that one of them lay directly overhead.

Then, from a long, long way away, came a little girl's voice. She had an accent Jack didn't recognize.

"My ball's gone over the hedge! It's in next door's garden!"

"Squeeze through and get it, then, Jeanie," said a lady's voice.

Jack, the Christmas Pig, the Loss Adjusters, and Blue Bunny continued to stare up at the big hole in the wooden sky, across which footsteps now echoed. Then they heard the little girl's voice again, louder and clearer than before.

"It landed in a flower bed! I'm glad they're not home."

And then a golden shaft of light appeared and hit the little bunny, who stood transfixed, his mouth open, a wild hope gleaming in his dark eyes.

"Mum!" said the girl's voice. "I've found a bunny! A blue bunny in the flower bed!"

The grubby blue bunny rose a few inches off the ground, tugged upward by the golden light. He looked around in amazement, clearly unable to believe what was happening.

"Leave it where you found it, Jeanie!" said the mother far above them. "It'll belong to one of the boys!"

"It must have been here for ages and ages!" said the little girl's voice. "It's all covered in mud!"

Blue Bunny rose a little higher in the shaft of golden light. Now he was hanging in midair. The three Loss Adjusters who were supposed to be guarding the gate were all so astonished to see what was happening that they walked forward to get a better view of the hole above them, trying to catch a glimpse of the girl odd enough to like a muddy blue bunny.

"Mum, they've left him out here for weeks, they can't care about him! Please can I—"

"Jeanie, no, not if it belongs to one of the boys," said the mother's voice.

Now the nutcracker, the nail file, and the dagger were standing right beneath the suspended bunny, clearly astounded that a Thing so dirty and badly made might have a chance of being found.

"Jack, now," whispered the Christmas Pig. "Run."

"But—"

"It's our only chance!" said the pig. "We can get through the gates while they're watching the bunny!"

So Jack got slowly to his feet, then dashed toward the glittering gates, and the Christmas Pig followed, holding his tummy.

Still the bunny hung, suspended in golden light, between the Land of the Living and the Land of the Lost, and the Loss Adjusters stood open-mouthed beneath him, gazing upward.

"Please, Mum," said the little girl's voice. "*Please* let me keep him. We'll wash him and show him to the boys and if they want him back, I'll give him to them."

"They won't want me back!" cried Blue Bunny in desperation. "Oh, take me, please take me, let me be yours!"

But of course, neither the girl nor her mother could hear the bunny.

"Look at his sweet little face, Mum!" said the girl.

Jack heard a tiny clink behind him. The Christmas Pig had pushed open the golden gates. Jack slid through them, still looking back over his shoulder at the bunny.

"Oh, *all right*," came the mother's voice, half-amused, half-exasperated. "I just hope he doesn't clog up the washing machine!"

And with a sudden whoosh, Blue Bunny was whipped through the hole and out of the Land of the Lost, but not before waving a single muddy paw at Jack, a look of bewildered joy on his face.





THE CITY OF THE MISSED

On the other side of the gates were no streets: only a canal bordered by beautiful tall houses with wrought iron balconies. Floating on the water were a number of empty gondolas, which were moored to a striped post sticking up out of the green water. The snow dappled the boats and spotted the water with flakes. The nearest gondola had a dark blue velvet blanket folded on the seat.

"You first!" the Christmas Pig whispered to Jack. "Get in the boat and hide under that blanket!"

Jack did as he was told, lying down in the bottom of the boat and dragging the thick velvet wrap over himself, which had clearly been

provided to keep passengers warm. Jack felt the gondola wobble as the Christmas Pig got on board, too, and wriggled under the blanket beside him. They lay curled up together, hoping nobody would notice the lumps in the velvet.

"Blimey," Jack heard one of the Loss Adjusters say.

"Only goes to show," said another voice.

"A dirty little bunny like that, found!" said the third.

"When's the last time you saw a bit of Surplus saved?"

"Not for years and years."

"Well, I've said it before and I'll say it again," came the first voice. "Kids is strange. Imagine that girl liking a muddy lump what had lain in a flower bed for ages!"

A distant whistle pierced the calm.

"Here it comes, bang on time," the voice continued. "Train from Misland."

Jack lay very still, curled up beside the Christmas Pig and listening to the sounds of the train chugging nearer and nearer. Soon the noise became deafening. Then, with a loud hiss and a screech of brakes, the train came to a halt. They heard the train doors open, and then the city gates, and then a lot of voices oohing and aahing at the sight of the beautiful gondolas waiting to take them into the heart of the city.

"Welcome, welcome!" the Loss Adjusters cried. "This way, sir . . . Watch your step there, Your Eminence . . . Perhaps you should have a gondola to yourself, Your Highness . . ."

Jack had never heard Loss Adjusters treating lost Things with such respect. Then Jack felt the gondola rock as some Thing climbed inside and adjusted itself on the seat. Strong heat was suddenly beating down on the velvet rug, as though the Thing in the gondola was on fire. Jack couldn't imagine what it might be.

"Would you like this, Your Highness?" came the nutcracker's voice from just over Jack's head. Jack and the Christmas Pig clutched each other in terror, expecting the velvet wrap to be tweaked off them.

"No, thank you, I never feel the cold," said a lady's voice.

There was a little more creaking of gondolas, and a few more "careful there, Your Worships," and then a Loss Adjuster's voice rang out from what Jack guessed was the gondola at the front.

"Your Highness, Your Eminence, Your Worship, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the City of the Missed! Please remain seated for our short journey and then we'll show you to your new homes!"

"We need to think of a way off this boat once we're farther into the city," whispered the Christmas Pig, his snout snuffling against Jack's cheek as the gondola began to move.

"Could we dive off while nobody's looking?" whispered Jack.

"What about this Thing that's sitting in the gondola with us? It's bound to see us and raise the alarm."

"It's very hot, whatever it is," whispered Jack.

"I know," said the Christmas Pig. "It feels like a burning coal. I'm surprised it hasn't set the boat on—"

Without warning, somebody twitched the velvet stole off them. For a horrified moment, Jack couldn't see anything at all, because the gondola was full of a dazzling golden light. It was as though the sun were sitting beside them.

"I'm not a burning coal," said the same lady's voice as before, which came from the very middle of the blazing light. It was so bright that Jack had to close his eyes for a moment, but he could see the Thing, even through his eyelids. "I'm Happiness."

"Happiness?" repeated Jack.

"Yes," she said. "Now do get up and enjoy the view. It's such a beautiful city!"

"We can't sit up," Jack whispered, his eyes watering again as he tried to look at Happiness. "We—we aren't supposed to be here."

"I guessed as much," she said, "but nobody will be able to spot you while you're close to me, because I'm so bright. Do sit up, and we can enjoy the ride together!"

Jack and the Christmas Pig pulled themselves up onto the seat facing Happiness. The heat she was giving off was wonderfully comforting after their hours spent on the snowy wastes, and as long as they didn't look at her directly, they were able to see their surroundings by her light.

The City of the Missed was unlike anything they'd seen so far in the Land of the Lost. The steps of the villas on either side of the canal ran down to the lapping water. It was dusk and strings of silver Christmas lights hung above their heads. From somewhere in the distance came the sound of a choir singing carols. There were many more finding holes over the City of the Missed than there'd been on the Wastes of the Unlamented, and Jack was glad to see them. Once they found DP, they should be able to get back up to the Land of the Living quite easily.

The gondolas passed under a stone bridge, across which a fat silver pocket watch was rolling, its reflection gleaming like a fallen moon. A glittering emerald necklace waved its clasp at the newcomers from an upper window, while a golden sovereign twinkled from a doorway. Jack craned his neck and looked all around, but nowhere could he see any old toys, and no hint of DP. There were, however, other Things, almost as odd and magnificent as Happiness.

"What are they?" Jack asked the Christmas Pig, as a gondola passed, going the other way. It contained a long coil of copper, on which lots of